

NO ONE could accuse *Scissor Happy* of being great drama, but it doesn't pretend to be. What it offers is an original, entertaining twist on the tired conventions of the whodunnit.

Though *The Mousetrap* continues its bafflingly long run, stage thrillers have had a lean time of it in recent years. Anthony Shaffer subverted the whole genre so ingeniously in *Sleuth* that there seemed nowhere new for dramatists to turn.

The creators of *Scissor Happy* (versions of which have been seen in 15 countries) have come up with a great gimmick. The audience plays detective.

Better still, this version has been adapted by three of the brightest names in improvised comedy — Neil Mullarkey, Lee Simpson and Jim Sweeney — so the jokes are excellent and distinctively British.

The action is set in the Scissor Happy hair salon in Covent Garden, presided over by the mag-

Whodunnit? Depends who's in the audience

nificently camp Tony (Paul Clayton), who announces that in Rotherham he'd be a stereotype but in London he's postmodern. He has a chirpy cockney assistant called Barbara (the delightful Nicola Stapleton, but, remember, appearances can be deceptive) and, when the play opens, three customers.

Before long, the murder is discovered of the eccentric concert pianist Isabel Czerny, who lives in the flat upstairs. She has been stabbed with a pair of scissors. One of the "customers" is revealed as a dim undercover detective constable (lovely comic performance from Doug Bradshaw) and then Inspector Coughlan (Lee Simpson) arrives to solve the crime with the audience's help.

Theatre

Scissor Happy
Duchess Theatre

The events leading up to the off-stage murder are re-enacted and the audience shout out when the actors diverge from what we have witnessed. Here I'm afraid your reviewer proved a duffer while the children in the audience were amazingly keen-eyed and eared.

After the interval, members of the audience interview both suspects and police, submitting questions which ranged on the opening night from the sensible and perceptive to the preposterous ("Where did you buy your top?").

The authors have supplied a

rich scattering of clues and red herrings and eventually the audience are asked to vote on who is guilty.

There are three different endings, and the version you see will depend on which suspect gets most votes. What's intriguing is that although *Scissor Happy* is frivolous, the familiar formulae of the thriller still work their old magic. There is a genuine hush among the audience as the denouement proceeds, and applause for a neat twist at the end.

I have a hunch that *Scissor Happy* will become an enduring feature in the West End, though I have one complaint. It seems to me that *none* of the suspects can be guilty, because of a glaring error in the scenario. I'd be interested to hear if you spot it too.

This review appeared in some editions yesterday. Tickets: 0171 494 5075

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